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OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the World Young Women's Christian Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category II

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. The World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA), a non-governmental organization in category II, appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Open-Ended Working Group's review of the consultative relationship. This is also an opportunity to express appreciation for the generous services of the NGO Unit and the splendid resources available through the United Nations Department of Public Information which make NGO work possible.

2. The World YWCA can speak with some authority on questions under review. It is a century-old international organization with indigenous national affiliates in 91 countries, including newly reactivated national YWCAs in central Europe. Its ethnically, racially, religiously and economically diverse membership numbers many millions, including one million in a single central African country. YWCA concerns largely parallel the economic and social interests of the United Nations. For example, YWCAs have traditionally promoted the concept of sustainable development through programmes in education, health, housing, family life, economic development and extensive work with refugees.

3. The World YWCA worked with the League of Nations; was represented by its General Secretary and others as observers in San Francisco at the 1945 United Nations Charter Conference; promoted United Nations membership through its national constituencies and was one of the early organizations accepted into consultative status. Policies and programmes are adopted at delegate World YWCA assemblies where rules favour youth and southern hemisphere delegations are a majority.

4. Members, including youth, from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific Island countries consistently represent the World YWCA at United Nations events and conferences and at United Nations centres. Stress on leadership training, of which these activities are a part, has been a factor in the selection of numbers of YWCA leaders as United Nations officials, delegates and even permanent representatives of their countries. Through its communications, publications, training events, decision-making processes and representation at Economic and Social Council and United Nations meetings and conferences, the World YWCA has persistently followed, participated in and sought to implement Economic and Social Council and United Nations resolutions and decisions; and, in turn, has been influenced by them.

5. Extensive documentation has been available to the Council Committee on NGOs during the past decade and earlier on NGO contributions, both human and material, to the work of the Council and the United Nations. The Committee has also had available, both from the NGO Unit, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status (CONGO), and individual NGOs documentation on questions under consideration in numerous reviews called for by the Council.

6. Particularly relevant, and still timely, are memoranda prepared by the Conference of NGOs for its 15th General Assembly, 13-16 September 1982; for the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Coordination of NGO Offices and Activities, 9 April 1985; the 1991 paper by the NGO Unit/DIESA on the basis of observations made by NGOs (CONSULT/1991/NGO.1) and the intervention of the CONGO president at the 26 March 1993 meeting of the Committee on NGOs. As these papers and numerous others on similar themes are in the possession of the Secretariat, this submission comments only on the need for safeguarding the effectiveness of the consultative relationship as authorized by Article 71 of the United Nations Charter, its elaboration as set forth in resolution 1296 (XLIV) and its enhancement through NGO participation in the series of great world conferences over the past quarter century.

7. World conferences on human rights, environment, population, women, law of the sea, human settlements, the ageing, the disabled and other critical world issues have generated an explosion of NGO interest and activity. The NGO impact has been apparent in the formulation of conference plans, in conference proceedings and in the implementation of conference recommendations.

8. Without access to decision-making processes and documentation, it is unlikely that NGOs could have succeeded in educational campaigns for implementation through governmental and non-governmental action. To assure continuing effective follow-up, world conferences need to be as open as facilities and staffing permit to organizations which have the capacity to contribute substantively and the outreach to stimulate support for conference

recommendations. This level of NGO access can be seen as partial insurance for the success of the conference.

9. Another high impact NGO activity which merits wholehearted support is the practice initiated and continued by the Conference of NGOs (CONGO) of organizing and raising funds for a parallel open forum at the site of world conferences. The forum programme enables thousands of concerned persons from all geographic regions not accredited to the conference to experience the substance and spirit of the conference, form networks for implementation, follow conference deliberations through a daily newspaper published by CONGO and distributed also to delegates, and return to their countries informed and motivated to strengthen public policy and their own programmes.

10. NGO representation from the southern hemisphere is an important goal of conference planners, as it is for NGOs, which have made possible the attendance of hundreds of members and others from developing countries to bring their perspectives and life experiences to recent conferences. The NGO role in this regard needs to be clarified. For example, if all representatives of organizations headquartered, for reasons of communication, in Europe, and whose local and national affiliates from other regions represented only through their international bodies are grouped as "European", as was done at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the participation of NGOs is distorted, their representatives are offended and the impression that NGO attendance is too heavily weighted from industrialized countries is reinforced. Principle No. 9 of resolution 1296 (XLIV) offers a guide to the accreditation of other than international organizations to conferences as well as to the ranks of NGOs in consultative status.

11. Due to lack of resources, most NGOs, are unable to maintain offices and personnel in United Nations headquarters cities unless they are based there. Consequently, not all, but many NGOs are forced to be represented by Americans at United Nations Headquarters in New York, by Swiss in Geneva, by Kenyans in Nairobi, by Austrians in Vienna, despite the fact that they may represent memberships which span the globe and bring to their work the experience of the organization.

12. A productive relationship can be maintained and strengthened with new organizations as well as with the international organizations in consultative status which have demonstrated the value of the relationship both to the work of the United Nations and to their own, by continuing standards set forth in resolution 1296 (XLIV). Breadth of membership, non-profit and non-governmental status, a high level of expertise in areas of United Nations work and capacity for outreach are among the requisites on the NGO side.

13. On the United Nations side, the totally inadequate number of staff charged with serving both the Committee on NGOs, other bodies and the NGOs themselves has often been noted. If consideration is being given to meeting the increasing demand for consultative status, questions need to be raised as to the workload of the NGO Committee, the small staff available for screening and countless other services, as well as the availability of facilities already overburdened in New York and Geneva.

14. In summary, the World YWCA suggests that extensive documentation exists on the issues before the Working Group; that resolution 1296 (XLIV) has the flexibility to continue defining the consultative relationship despite changes taking place; that an analysis of NGO support, membership and representation at world conferences be made before formulating general guidelines for NGO accreditation, that parallel forums at the sites of world conferences should be encouraged and that expanding the NGO Unit and creativity in the use of space are imperative to accommodate a larger number of NGOs.